

FOUR GENERATIONS OVERCOMING ADDICTION

Conversation Guide: Parent to Teen

If you've struggled with addiction yourself or if addiction runs in your family, your teen needs to know about it — and know that there's help. It starts with a conversation. If you suspect your teen is experimenting with, and possibly developing a dependence on alcohol or other drugs, the following steps can help you get that difficult first conversation started.

- 1. Learn as much as you can beforehand about teen alcoholism and addiction.** Try the following resources: www.theantidrug.com, www.drugabuse.gov, www.al-anon.org
- 2. Adopt the right attitude.** Here are some things to keep in the back of your mind as you talk with your teen:
 - ✓ Remember, addiction is not your fault — nor your child's. Addiction is a disease and it runs in families; it is not a moral issue.
 - ✓ Tell your son or daughter exactly what you are seeing and how it is affecting you.
 - ✓ Be concerned, caring and non-judgmental. Keep in mind you are starting a conversation—a two-way conversation with your teen. Take a deep breath and let them have their say—without judgment or condemnation on your part.
 - ✓ Manage your expectations. This will likely be the first of many conversations you will have with your teen about this topic. These are not easy conversations to have. Be prepared to accept an unfavorable response. Remember, addiction treatment and recovery are a process and they take time.
- 3. Determine your key messages.** Oftentimes when chemicals and emotions are involved, conversations can have a way of getting off track. Choose a few key messages you'd like to convey and repeat them often. These messages could include:
 - ◆ Addiction runs in our family and it's nothing to be ashamed about. (This is where you may want to share a personal story about yours or a family member's experience with the disease.)
 - ◆ You are loved and can come to the me anytime without punishment or judgment
 - ◆ There is help available when you need it
- 4. Set the right stage.** These types of conversations need to come about in a neutral, unhurried environment.
- 5. Leave it with love.** Not all conversations will go perfectly, but they can end on a hopeful note. Even if your teen gets angry, remind him or her of your love and concern and reiterate your willingness to be there when he or she is ready.
- 6. Know where to go for help.** If you think your child may be addicted to alcohol or other drugs, there is help available. For more information on treatment or other options, contact Hazelden 24 hours a day at (800) 257-7810 or online at hazelden.org.

Print out this conversation guide and have it ready as a refresher when you are ready to sit down with a teen in your life.

Check for more information, content updates and inspiring new stories of addiction and recovery at www.fourgenerations.org

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The Parent to Teen Conversation

A Sample Script

Honey, I'd like to talk to you about something...

There's a disease that runs in our family and I'm worried about your risk of getting it...

I'm talking about drug addiction and alcoholism.

Yes, addiction to drugs and alcohol is an actual disease and many of your relatives have struggled with it.

You might picture Grandpa George as this incredibly successful businessman—we all do, because he is—but did you know 20 years ago he struggled with alcoholism? We tried for years to get him to stop drinking, but that just made him hide it from us more. My mom hated his drinking and wouldn't let him bring alcohol into the house. But I knew he was sneaking it when she wasn't looking... After two DWIs, he couldn't hide it anymore. Thankfully, before he hurt himself or killed someone because of his drunken driving, he found AA – Alcoholics Anonymous – and stopped drinking.

And your aunt Susan ... she has been struggling with this disease too. But in her case, it's prescription painkillers. Remember, she had that accident four years ago and hurt her back -- and now she can't stop taking the pills. Just because a doctor prescribes something doesn't mean it's safe or can't cause addiction. You've seen what it's done to Aunt Susan and to your cousins...

The reason I'm telling you this is because I love you. I know you're at an age where you might be offered alcohol or other drugs, and I'm not telling you to "just say no." What I'm saying is that if you try drugs or alcohol, you may find that someday you simply won't be able to stop ... You are at a greater risk of developing addiction than other people.

A lot of people don't understand that addiction is a disease—a chronic illness—just like diabetes or breast cancer. We don't cause ourselves to get the disease but if we do get it, it gets progressively worse and even life threatening. The most important thing I want you to know is that people recover from addiction, just like people recover from heart disease and other illnesses.

I also want you to know that if you ever find yourself having trouble with alcohol or other drugs, you can come to me. I won't judge you or get angry – after all, it's a disease, and you can't get angry at someone for coming down with a disease, can you? And sometime when you see Grandpa George, you might want ask him about all of this – I know he'd be really open to that.

Just know I'm here for you and there is help if you ever need it, OK?